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Kelsey, Kate
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Wayside Poems

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Dedicated to friends who love Nature in all her moods and have enjoyed her companionship in byways of Northern Wisconsin.

KATE KELSEY

Cable, Wis. Nov. 19, 1913

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THE New Year's chimes
Are ringing clear,
In happy rhymes
Both far and near,

They call to friends
And seem to say,
"The old time ends
With this new day—

Renew thy trust
In human love
Renew thy trust
In God above."

LIFE

WHAT is a life but a span of years,
Touching the shores of the great unknown—
Years as we make them of hopes and fears,
Evil or beautiful, all our own?

Out of eternity life appears—
Into eternity souls must go,
Crossing the bridge of our fleeting years—
Reaching the haven with friend and foe.

Let then thy deeds be so good and true,
Let then thy life be so strong and free,
That they who build as the years ensue
Will make life better because of thee.

PEACE

AYE, fling your white flecks
Against the rocks!
And hurl your doomed wrecks
With thunder shocks!

Your triumphs are brief,
Life's stormy deep
And treacherous reef
Where wild waves leap,

Below is the calm
Of the infinite deep—
Above is the calm
Of the infinite deep.

PLEA OF THE FOREST

A CRY from the depths of the wild
Comes winging its way to my heart,—
The forest thus speaks to its child,
"O, listen to me as we part!

They've come with their greed and their gold
To shatter my temples so grand,—
They say that my life must be sold
For barter in marts of the land.

My shelter's a refuge for all—
The weakest and strongest can find
A home and sweet peace in my hall,
Where Nature is helpful and kind.

The birds and the beasts and the flowers,
My children, have done men no wrong:
Must greed with its fettering powers
Take me and their beauty and song?

Speak, child, for the forest and say,
'O men of the world and of gold!
The groves are the temples today
Where Judas no master has sold.

Come back to your home in the wild,
Come back to the true and the good,
Again come to me as a child—
My temples for ages have stood!' "

THE SHADOW OF A CLOUD

FROM cloudland's misty port one day
There sailed a snowy barque,
And, soaring sunward on the way,
There came a singing lark.

We saw the twain athwart the sky
Their airy pathway take,
And over vale and hilltop high
A shadow in their wake.

But, sweet and clear, we heard the song—
The shadow quickly passed—
Thus, out of sorrow, pain and wrong,
Come songs of joy at last.

IMMORTALITY

"THERE is no death," we hear them say,
The great and good of old,
"'Tis but a change to endless day
Within God's sheltered fold."

But when from life dear love departs,
When cold and still he lies
What hope is there for breaking hearts
Beyond those bending skies?

"The love that fails is not true love,"
We hear a sweet voice say,
"For linked with God's own heart above
True love endures for aye!"

WHERE GOD ABIDES

THE doors are open one and all,
And sweet the anthems' sacred call
Where God abides:

No priestly cant or time worn creed
Usurps the place of kindly deed—
Where God abides:

Each day of all the gladsome year
Alike hath power to draw us near,
Where God abides:

And ever in the human heart
The living springs of goodness start—
Where God abides.

TRUE WEALTH

ONCE more, as in a dream, he sees
The old familiar country lane,
A verdant aisle mid stately trees,
Where feathered songsters live and reign.

The fragrant air is full of song,
As in "some vast cathedral dim,"
Where incense burns the whole day long,
And voices chant a heavenly hymn.

The wealth of beauty, life and joy,
Which Nature spreads with lavishness,
Is lost to him a thoughtless boy
Who trudges on in eagerness.

With downcast eyes he hurries by—
Into the world of strife and care,
Without a thought of flower or sky—
Into the dusty highway's glare.

The vision fades—he dreams again.
Within a city's mighty wall
He sees a thronging crowd of men
Before a monstrous idol fall.

The god is stately, grand and strong,
Of burnished gold and jewels rare:
And over all the waiting throng
He casts a spell—resist who dare!

A man kneels there, the boy of old,
But beauty, strength and grace have fled—
Who worships at the shrine of Gold
His soul within is cold and dead!

But hark! from out the city's roar,
He hears the sound of singing birds—
It takes him to his father's door—
To field and flocks and lowing herds.

"O happy home! O days of youth!
O meadow brook and grassy lane!
Too late," he cries "I learn, in sooth,
You're more than gold or fame can gain!"

TRUST

UPON the cliff the eagle there
His pinion spreads for higher flight,
And trusting in the buoyant air
He wings his way to greater height.

With joy he soars, but know not why
The air upholds him on the way—
Enough to feel that Power nigh
Which holds the universe in sway.

A WINTER MIRACLE

LAST night a miracle was wrought,
Beneath the moonbeam's gentle sway:
For, when the wavy hilltops caught
The rosy shafts of new-born day,

Behold! the desolation, born
Of wind and storm and greed and fire,
Had fled before the light of morn:
And, as the sun rose high and higher,

The arrows of the sunlight flashed
Across a world of dazzling white,
And smote the frost king who had cast
His magic spell for one brief night.

O'er wasted vale and hill top high
He made the chastened landscape smile,
He hushed the lone pine's mournful sigh
And scattered beauty mile o'er mile.

O wondrous power to thus efface,
For one brief moment, man's disgrace!

FRIENDSHIP

A GLEAM of truth! A flood of light!
And lo! the earth is glorified;
No longer dwell our souls in night
For Love and Life are now allied.

We look into those speaking eyes
Where faithful Love finds eloquence
And then into the starry skies
With heart up-raised in reverence,

And see the selfsame power there
That guides a soul or rules a star.
O blessed thought! O visions fair
Of heaven revealed so near and far!

THE BEST CATCH

WHEN we went fishing, Maud and I,
Within the shadowed waters nigh
The mossy bank that summer day,
The speckled trout in safety lay.

What did we catch? you ask in vain
If all the angler has to gain
Is trophy of the hook and line,
Then ask his comrades home to dine.

We caught a glimpse of summer skies:
And, as we watched a sky-lark rise,
From out the azure depths so fair
We caught the song that thrilled the air.

The fragrant breath of tall pine trees
We caught from every passing breeze,
While in the waters calm and clear
The trout flashed by without a fear.

What did we catch? The joy of life
And freedom from all care and strife,—
We caught the smile on Nature's face
In that enchanted happy place.

O many days have passed away,
Since Maud and I, that summer day,
Caught hope and joy and visions fair;
But left the trout to Nature's care!

THE THOUGHT OF GOD

ONE day a Thought that long had dwelt,
Where pleasures, joy and sweet content
Made life a dream, and ne'er were felt
The care and pain to mortals sent,

Aroused his vassals, tried and true,
The Shield of Faith, the Sword of Love,
And said, "Today I go with you:
I've seen a signal high above

The ramparts on yon misty height.
'Tis truth imprisoned there, I know,
I hear her summons day and night—
'Tis Error, our intrepid foe,

Who holds her in his stronghold fast."
The Thought went forth with sword and shield.
Through Love false idols down he cast—
Faith saved him on a battle field.

He climbed the rugged hills of Doubt
By Superstitions narrow path,
And reaching Error's strong redoubt,
With Faith and Love and Righteous Wrath,

He fought the fight; when lo! the gate
Flew open wide and noble Truth
Shone on him there in regal state
And cried, "O blessed happy youth!

Thou art the Thought of God indeed,
That, striving onward and above,
Hast won the pathway that doth lead
To God and Truth, through Faith and Love."

THE PASSING OF SUMMER

O SUMMER day! where hast thou fled,
And why hast thou left us in wrath?
Thy sunlight in glory hath shed
Its cheering rays over our path.

The birds and the flowers were here—
They came at the call of thy voice:
But now in the woodland so drear
No longer they live and rejoice.

Thou'st left all the landscape and sky
To winter the tempest and snow:
Must Beauty and Pleasure thus die
For darkness and sorrow and woe?

List! under the ermine of snow
We hear in reply this refrain:
To Beauty and Life I'm no foe
I rest 'neath the snow—not in vain.

The robin will come at my call
From Southland to forest and glade;
The flowers too come at my call
From Summerland's covert and shade.

I come in the day of the year,
When winter, the night time, is past,
And sing and rejoice without fear
Till peace and repose come at last.

Then fret thou not when the dark night
Comes after the the summer of trust,
With sorrow and darkness and blight—
For God in his mercy is just.

Again will the sunlight so gleam
On life that is barren today—
Thy winter will seem but a dream,
And brighter will be thy new May.

TRUE EFFORT

IN ancient times there dwelt a man,
A soul of God's own choosing,
He smote the rock and forth there ran
A fount of living water.

At God's command the wonder came—
The desert waste received it—
And lo! at call of Duty's name
The hand of man redeemed it.

The thirsty multitude was glad,
Their stony hearts were riven,
And forth from lives once cold and sad
Came deeds of love and duty—

As Moses with the wand of God
The rock in Horeb rifted,
So may we with the magic rod
Of love his service enter.

Christ says to all, "Strike at the heart
Though hard and cold from sinning
Touch thou the secret springs and start
The stream of true endeavor."

The hardened heart will ever yield,
When love directs the effort,
And far and wide a verdant field
Will spring in desert places—

PROGRESSION

UPON the radiant heights of life,
Success attained and laurel crowned,
A soul looked down on scenes of strife:
But far above, enclosing round,
Arose eternal hills of God!

A mortal climbed to heights of love,
Thus heeding well life's sweetest call:
Below there dwelt, whose dreams of love
Were vain, but, tow'ring over all—
Behold eternal love of God!

"I'm satisfied," you cry—but pause,
And look again into the skies,
Where high above all human laws,—
Beyond all mortal loves still rise
The great eternal heights of God!

WITHOUT THE PALACE GATES

SOFT blows the breeze, clear flow the streams;
And, from the leafy chancels near,
The feathered songsters wake from dreams
The powers of life and hope, my dear,
Without the palace gates—

We feel the impulse that has come
To flowing stream and budding flower,
And hear the busy happy hum
Of life at fullest tide of power—
Without the palace gates.

O, sometimes in the stress of life,
Where Gold has built his palace rare,
We feel that higher impulse rife!—
'Tis love we know, 'tis joy we share—
Without the palace gates.

THE APOSTLE ISLANDS

ACROSS the waters, glory spanned,
By sparkling waves of light,
The shores of misty island-land
Reward our eager sight.

The freighted ships go sailing by—
The eagle soars afar,
Within the azure depths of sky,
The home of sun and star.

We stand upon the cliffs, and lo!
Life's tumult and life's care
Pass gentle by, like ships that go,
We know not where they fare.

The distant islands, wondrous fair,
Across the waters gleam:
Lord, thy apostles true are there—
They call as in a dream.

They call to heights of love and light,
They call us from the sod,
They call us far by Beauty's might—
They call us unto God!

THE FOREST FIRE

LIKE prowling beast of prey
There came into our sight—
A cloud of smoke by day
A lurid glow by night.

Man, helpless in the fight,
The fire fiend could not stay:
It crept along by night—
It marched along by day.

It stole through forest glades—
It scorched the flowers and grass—
And all their beauty fades
As on its cohorts pass.

With every passing breeze,
The leaping flames rose higher.
They climbed the sighing trees
And waved their flags of fire.

But hark! from out the sky—
A welcome thunder peal!
Soon all the landscapes nigh
The cooling raindrops feel.

The fire fiend slinks away
Before the gentle shower,
And through the night and day
It feels a conquering power.

O, not the fierce and strong,
And not the moments sway
Of blighting powers of wrong,
The might of goodness stay!

THE SNOW STORM

LAST night the great storm-king
A cruel warfare waged—
His icy arrows sting
Where'ere the battle raged.

The forest-king stood strong,
With peaceful out-stretched hands,
And sang the victor's song
Of peace for all the lands.

Today, the storm-king lies
So still neath robes of snow—
'Tis thus that evil dies
For right must win we know.

O pine tree, symbol true
Of peace and strength and love,
Your weapons, though so few,
Were forged and shaped above!

DAWN

ALONG the east the sky is gray—
The sea takes on the sombrous hue,
And Nature gladly greets the day
With restful faith in what is new.

In glad surprice I see the gleam
Of sunrise on yon mountain crest,
And lo! the morning banners stream
Across the valley's peaceful rest.

O, Sun of Truth, whose ray divine
A newer better day awakes!
Shine in this darkened soul of mine
And scatter clouds that Error makes!

Along the east I long have seen
The promise of a better time;
With restful faith in what has been
Of good in every age and clime,

I wait the coming of that day,
When Justice reigns, and Mercy too,
And Love Divine its mission may
Fulfill in all made pure and true.

A CHRISTMAS VISION

AWAY to the depths of the wild,
Away from the dwellings of men,
A soul, like a wandering child,
Strayed back to the forest again,

'Twas Christmas—and in the long aisles
That mid the tall spires of the pines,
Like streets of a city for miles,
Extended in beauteous lines;

Behold! there was gathered a throng—
The hosts of the forests were there—
The soul that had wandered so long
Rejoiced at the vision so fair:

For there in the depths of the wild,
Where Christmas trees sparkled and shone,
The fierce and the gentle and mild,
The beasts that we've cherished and known,

Had come at the call of the One
Who'd sent a great gift to the earth—
For had he not given His Son—
A ransom for peace upon earth?

The wolf and the deer and the hare,
The bear with its fierce claw and mien,
The pheasant and eagle were there,
And many that could not be seen.

But all was peace and good will:
The soul gazed in wonder and awe
And wished that a message might still
Reach man in this new reign of law.

Thus, Christmas can temper us all,
With blessings of peace and good cheer;
The world and the wild have a call—
May Christmas day ever be near!

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